



Acquisition Projects Continue to Aid Flood-Prone Community

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Henry County, Illinois

Cleveland, IL - It's just a little winding river in northwestern Illinois, but the Rock River drains a large watershed that includes the Upper Rock, the Pecatonica River in Wisconsin and even as far north as Lake Winnebago. When heavy rain or snow melt occurs in that watershed, the Rock River can rise quickly. That's why residents of this small village of 300 near the mouth of the Rock River have endured flooding year after year.



But the recurring devastation of flooding was considerably lessened during the last two flood events: following an ice jam on the river in February of 2001 and a tremendous amount of rainfall in June of 2002. An acquisition program conducted under FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program removed a total of 31 structures from the floodplain that had received repeated damage over the years, including the home of Nancy Hoskins. Her house had filled with three feet of water, then four and a half feet, then five and half feet in three consecutive floods before she sold her home through the acquisition program in 2001.

After the Great Midwestern Flood of 1993, members of the community began discussing the possibility of an acquisition project with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA). A major flood in 1997 created a strong incentive for the program and by February 1998, properties were being purchased. IEMA and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources/Office of Water Resources (IDNR/OWR) coordinated the voluntary buyout of 13 homes in Phase I and 18 homes to date in Phase II. An HMGP grant provided \$989,742 for the projects, along with a Floodplain Mitigation Assistance grant of \$472,920. The IDNR contributed the 25% matching funds, which totaled \$487,554.

The buyout process is never an easy journey, but the road traveled in Cleveland shows that challenges can be surmounted with a focus on helping those most in need, commitment from community leaders and funding agencies and open communication. People in Cleveland worried about the town changing. But they also worried about the hazardous conditions resulting from almost yearly flooding that had to be endured by senior residents.

"The community of Cleveland focused on helping those in harm's way to have an alternative to flooding, especially those who were elderly or ill in Phase I of the project," said Bob Sherman, IEMA Mitigation Planner. He added that Bob Collis, Cleveland's point of contact for the acquisition program, "worked hard to make sure people got out that wanted to."

Communication is an important component in keeping the acquisition process running smoothly. "Many times people don't get the whole story from the appropriate source; they get a half truth and hearsay, causing misconceptions about the buyout program," said Sherman.

For Collis, explaining the components of the buyout program to residents was a priority when initiating the program. Collis and local officials met with residents prior to the public meeting just to explain how everything worked.

"Then those people who were participating in Phase I attended the public meeting and representatives from IEMA, IDNR and FEMA helped explain the whole program to them," said Collis.

Resident participant Nancy Hoskins noted that it's very important for all parties to keep communicating as the buyout proceeds through the appraisals and closing transactions so that all parties know the timing and when the monies will be available. Although it can be a lengthy and complex process, Hoskins said that when the river rose in June 2002 she was glad she had participated in the buyout: "This year there would have been at least five and a half feet in my house if it had still been there."

Community leaders and IEMA hope to bring that same sense of security to those approximately 25 homeowners who were affected by floodwaters in 2002. Initiatives are currently being taken to continue successfully mitigating in the Rock River floodplain with a Phase III buyout.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region V**

State: **Illinois**

County: **Henry County**

City/Community: **Cleveland**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Private**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts; Relocation**

Activity/Project Start Date: **02/1998**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **No**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Unknown**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Yes**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://www.floodsmart.gov/>**

Reference URL 2: **<http://www.state.il.us/iema/>**

Main Points

- But the recurring devastation of flooding was considerably lessened during the last two flood events: following an ice jam on the river in February of 2001 and a tremendous amount of rainfall in June of 2002.
- After the Great Midwestern Flood of 1993, members of the community began discussing the possibility of an acquisition project with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA).
- Community leaders and IEMA hope to bring that same sense of security to those approximately 25 homeowners who were affected by floodwaters in 2002. Initiatives are being taken to continue successfully mitigating in the Rock River floodplain with a Phase III buyout.



Flooding in the buyout area where three homes once stood



This home sustained substantial flood damage in February 2001